

A conflict of interests sparks rights debate

It took a lawsuit, but a Wichita-area suburb has admitted it did wrong by filing criminal charges against a citizen who put a sign in his yard critical of the city.

Who'd have thought that kind of thing still happens in America? Still, it appears officials sometimes will violate the Constitution just because they can, just as some will violate open meetings or open records laws — just because they can.

It can be tough to be in government. You're open to criticism on all sides. Sometimes officials just get tired of dealing with people, especially if they're persistent and make themselves known.

That's apparently what happened in Valley Center, where the city attorney filed a little-used charge of criminal libel against a citizen who complained about a drainage problem in his yard.

The homeowner, Jarrod West, posted a sign June 25 that said "Dear Valley Center, I did not buy Lake Front Property! Fix this problem. This is what I pay taxes for. P.S. Joel, this means you!"

The "Joel" apparently referred to City Administrator Joel Pile, the Associated Press reports.

City Attorney Barry Arbuckle sent West a letter questioning the factual accuracy of the yard sign, particularly Pile's personal responsibility for drainage problems, court records show. Fearing legal action, West removed the sign July 10.

However, eight days later, he was named in a criminal complaint alleging that the sign exposed the city administrator to "public contempt and ridicule ... tending to deprive him of the benefit of public confidence and social acceptance."

Apparently, you can't fight City Hall.

The city later dismissed the complaint "without prejudice," meaning the charges could be refiled. The city attorney allegedly wouldn't promise otherwise, and Mr. West called in the American Civil Liberties Union. A suit was filed in federal District Court and a hearing set on an injunction.

It seems the First Amendment bars government from persecuting citizens for exercising their rights. Here's the text of what many consider the key part of the Bill of Rights:

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

The suit alleged that Mr. West could not exercise free speech or petition the city government while subject to criminal charges. Apparently, the city saw the light. In a settlement agreement, it promised not to reinstate the charges, plus pay Mr. West \$2,000 in damages and \$6,000 for attorney's fees.

"The First Amendment's cardinal purpose is to prohibit government from prosecuting citizens for seditious libel," said Doug Bonney, the lawyer assigned to the case, "but that's exactly what Valley Center did ... That is an outrage."

We couldn't have said it better. The freedoms of the First, to worship, speak and publish as we wish and have our say with government, are priceless, not to be trampled by anyone.

Amen, and thank God for the ACLU.

— Steve Haynes

Your political connection

★ **Governor Mark Parkinson**, 300 SW 10th Ave., Topeka, Kan. 66612. (785) 296-3232

★ **U.S. Sen. Pat Roberts**, 109 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. (202) 224-4774; fax (202) 224-3514

★ **U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback**, 303 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. (202) 224-6521

★ **U.S. Rep. Jerry Moran**, 2443 Rayburn HOB, Washington, D.C. 20515. (202) 225-2715; fax (202) 225-5124

★ **State Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer**, State Capitol Building, Room 262-E, Topeka, Kan. 66612. (785) 296-7399

★ **State Rep. John Faber**, 181 W. Capitol Building, Topeka, Kan. 66612. (785) 296-7500



Will she run for the presidential office?

"Other candidates haven't faced these criticisms the way I have... I'm on television nearly every single day with reporters... Now granted, that's mainly through my job at Fox News, and I'm very proud to be associated with them, but I'm not avoiding anything or anybody. I'm on Facebook and Twitter. I'm out there. I want to talk about my record, though."

And so the race begins. Sarah Palin has now admitted she is seriously considering a run for the presidency in 2012 and feels she could defeat President Obama. Her new reality show, Sarah Palin's Alaska, was a hit with nearly five million viewers, the most watched premier for the TLC network. In addition she has recently appeared on The View, but to say she is not avoiding "anyone or anybody" might be a bit of a stretch. If Palin is determined to become a candidate she is going to have to appear on news shows, other

Phase II Mary Kay Woodyard



running mate and her dropped stint as governor. That is not to say she hasn't brought about change because there is no denying she has energized an electorate not known for being animated. She has created a party which impacted both democrats and republicans in the mid-term election.

One thing she will have to do, however if she is to become a serious contender is to drop the whining, victim stance. Trying to gain sympathy because you feel as if everyone has mistreated you does little to emphasize your strengths. Whether Sarah Palin can be a serious candidate is anyone's guess. Whatever you want the polls to say about her, they will. The numbers are all over the chart and so only time will tell. mkwoodyard@ruraltel.net

than FOX. It is easy to be interviewed by those who applaud your endeavors, but if she is serious about running she will have to take the hard questions as well. In addition, being "out there" means more than Facebook and Twitter.

Talking about her record may present even more of a challenge. She has said she wants people to know of her accomplishments for the last two decades and yet finding the information is no easy task. Any accomplishments are overshadowed by being John McCain's

The pride we like to take in our children

A couple of weeks ago our middle daughter came back to the Midwest from her home in Georgia. She drove because making flight connections for all her stops was nearly impossible. First she drove to her older sister's home in Nebraska. She saw her older nephew, a high school senior, play his last regular season football game. His younger brother is also on the football team. She spent time with her sister and watched the youngest member of the family, a nine year old girl, play volleyball.

She then drove to our house on Saturday night. She planned to spend Sunday with a high school classmate and close friend. She attended church with her friend. After my husband and I attended church, we went out for lunch. A woman I know came up to me and said, "There was someone in church this morning who reminded me of someone I know; I couldn't think who it was. It had to be your daughter."

Life is Good Rita Speer



week old new baby girl. She spent about four days with them

We ate at the same restaurant the next Sunday. That morning another woman I knew told me of an encounter she had had with Allison the previous Sunday. This woman and her husband shared about a recent mission trip to Mexico. Allison had been to the same place in September, and they shared about some of the places they had both seen.

Allison spent just a little more than two days in Norton this time, but she obviously made an impression on people who had not met her before. How wonderful that these people shared their experiences with me and allowed me to bask in the glow of those positive effects. Parents never fail to enjoy hearing lovely things about their children, even when they are adults and used to living on their own. This two day visit gave me a glow that lasted days after she left Norton.

ter!" Yes, I replied, it was. Later Allison and her friend came into the restaurant for lunch, and I visited with them. The woman looked at us and smiled.

The next morning Allison joined several of us who breakfast together after Mass. I was pleased to introduce Allison to these friends, and she visited comfortably. A couple of days later, one of the women commented on what a nice young woman Allison was. I glowed with pride, naturally.

Allison left the next day for the final leg of her trip. She headed to Iowa to spend a few days with her brother and his wife, their not-quite-two year-old daughter and two-

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Dear Editor:

Because I believe in The Salvation Army's mission and community commitment, I voluntarily serve in The Salvation Army service unit in Norton County. Even though Norton does not have uniformed personnel or a SA community center, we do have local volunteers who are very giving and committed to our service unit. Without their support, this local service would not be available.

With the season of joy and happiness in full swing, my number one wish is for everyone who can, to share a gift with others less fortunate in Norton County. The sight of Salvation Army kettles and bell ringers may remind us to be thankful for what we have and to think of others who may not have as much. 88% of the money donated to the local kettle drive, stays in Norton County for vital community assistance.

This year we have been able to provide a website for those who would rather donate directly to Norton County's kettle drive by internet. You can easily donate by credit card to: <http://give.salvationarmyusa.org/goto/nortoncounty>

Thank you to all for your past and continued support. With your help, The Salvation Army Norton service unit is able to make a difference in our community.

Sincerely,
Penny Otter, Norton County Health Department
Pam Menagh and Sharon Leiker